DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 258 912 SO 016 673

AUTHOR Schmidt, Nancy J.
TITLE Children's Books in Subsaharan Africa.
INSTITUTION Indiana Univ., Bloomington. African Studies Program.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Viewpoints (120)
JOURNAL CIT News and Notes on the Social Sciences; insert pB1-B4 Spr 1984-85

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Books; *Childrens Literature; Content Analysis; Fiction; Folk Culture; Foreign Countries; Futures (of Society); History; Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS *Africa (Sub Sahara)

ABSTRACT

The history of and current trends in the publication of children's books in Subsaharan Africa are discussed, and the books' contents are examined. The publication of children's books for African children was started by Euroamerican missionaries in the 19th century. Publication was always related to education. With the achievement of independence, children's books with African content were needed to further the development of African nationalism. In addition, Africans needed editorial control over the production of books for their children. Thus began the process of the indigenization of publishing in Africa, which still continues today. Presently, 80 percent of published books are for children. The publication of all kinds of books has nearly doubled since 1975, but the publication of children's books has more that tripled in the same period. African children's books include a wealth of folklore. Most fiction written for African children is didactic. The adventure story is replacing the fictional child biography as the predominant type of story. The publication of African children's literature is expected to triple again before the end of this century. (RM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED258912

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Nancy J. Schmidt

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN SUBSAHARAN AFRICA

by
Nancy J. Schmidt
African Studies Program
Indiana University

News and Notes on the Social Sciences
Spring 1984-85

SO 016 673

AFRICAN STUDIES OUTREACH
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

AFRICAN STUDIES PROGRAM
Woodburn Hall 221
Bloomington, Indiana 47405
812/335-6825 or 335-6734

OUTREACH COORDINATORS
Brian Winchester
Merry Merryfield

SPRING 1984-85

CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN SUBSAHARAN AFRICA

by Nancy J. Schmidt,
African Studies Area Specialist,
Indiana University Library

The production of children's books is the most rapidly growing segment of the publishing industry in Subsaharan Africa in the 1980s. School texts, supplementary school readers and trade books are published in English, French, Portuguese and hundreds of African languages. The 1983 edition of *African Books in Print* listed over 600 children's books excluding textbooks, a threefold increase in the eight years since the publication of the first edition of *African Books in Print*. This rapid growth is the culmination of a process that began in the nineteenth century with the European colonization of Africa and received its major impetus from the achievement of independence in all but two African nations (Namibia and South Africa) since the late 1950s.

DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLISHING BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

The publication of children's books for African children was started by Euroamerican missionaries in the nineteenth century. From the beginning the production of children's books was related to education: learning to read in European and African languages and learning about Christianity. African folklore was published too, largely because of its moral lessons, often expressed in proverbs, which could be related to Christian values. Children's fiction often focused on the heroic struggle of an African child to reconcile the values of so-called "heathen" culture with Christianity. This literature was written primarily by missionaries, but also by a few literate African Christians, usually teachers or clergymen. Most children's books were short paperback volumes distributed primarily in the country in which they were published.

In the twentieth century, especially in English-speaking countries, European publishers such as Oxford, Macmillan and Longman began to produce school readers and supplementary readers for African schoolchildren. Like the missionary publications, these books were paperback volumes, usually less than fifty pages in length. Initially these books were written by Euroamerican authors and had the same content as those published for British children, except that the illustrations showed Africans. The books included Dick and Jane type stories that aimed to teach children to read, European folktales, and fiction about children's activities at home and at school.

In some English-speaking countries literature bureaus were established to produce materials in African languages to teach children to read, to collect folklore texts in African languages, and to encourage Africans to write historical and sociocultural descriptions of their cultures. Some of the folklore was published in versions for children. The African language books were similar to those in English, although there were fewer illustrations.

The publication of books for African children changed markedly with the achievement of independence. Children's books with African content were needed to further the development of African nationalism and, even more importantly, Africans needed editorial control over the production of books for their children. Thus began the process of the indigenization of publishing in Africa, which is still continuing today in four major contexts.

First, the multinational European publishers have been indigenized through the establishment of branch offices in capital cities such as Lagos, Nigeria; Accra, Ghana; and Nairobi, Kenya. Gradually the staffs of these branches have been Africanized, and the authors and illustrators of their books are increasingly African, rather than European. Now these multinationals publish books in African as well as European languages. Second, European and African publishers have jointly established new publishing houses where Africans have editorial control over the books that are published. Third, African governments have provided substantial financial support for the establishment of such publishers as Ghana Publishing Corporation in Accra, Ghana, and Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines in both Dakar, Senegal and Abidjan, Ivory Coast. And fourth, Africans are starting publishing houses. One of the most successful is Onibonoje Press in Ibadan, Nige-

ria, which publishes school textbooks and a junior African literature series. Internationally known African creative writers and critics such as Chinua Achebe, Abiola Irele and Flora Nwapa in Nigeria have also established presses for children's books.

PUBLICATION OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN THE 1980S

Presently, 80% of the books published in Subsaharan Africa are for children. The publication of all kinds of books in Subsaharan Africa has nearly doubled since 1975, but the publication of children's books has more than tripled in the same period. This dramatic increase is related not only to the large increase in the school-age population, but also to the concern of African educators, writers, librarians and politicians with producing appropriate material for African children. Since the school-age population is expected to grow by 72% by the year 2000, children's book publishing will probably continue to dominate African publishing in the 1990s.

Publication is most extensive in such large nations as Nigeria, Senegal, Zaire and Kenya. Although publication is increasing, there are temporary declines, as in Ghana where adverse economic conditions led to a substantial reduction in book production. For historical reasons book publishing is more extensive in English-speaking Africa than in French- and Portuguese-speaking Africa. Although there is more publication in English than in any other language, substantial publication is done in widely-spoken African languages such as Yoruba, Hausa, and Swahili.

The steady growth of children's book publishing is encouraging considering the substantial technical and financial problems that face African publishers. The publishers have found creative solutions to producing attractive books for children. A children's book published by Educational Press in Accra, Ghana, *The Brassman's Secret*, written and illustrated by Meshack Asare, won the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa in 1982. It was cited as an "exciting and unusual children's story, beautifully and imaginatively illustrated." In 1983 Ngugi wa Thiongo's children's story in Gikuyu, *Njambe Nene Na Mbaathi I Mathagu* (The Big Hero and the Winged Bus) published in Nairobi, Kenya by Heinemann Educational Books East Africa received an honorable mention by the Noma Award Committee. Children's books will be a major focus of the Zimbabwe International Book Fair in August, 1985 which is evidence that the publishing of African children's books has come of age.

The typical African children's book in the 1980s is a paperback of less than fifty pages measuring five by seven and one-half inches with black-and-white illustrations. The author and illustrator are usually Africans, although sometimes Euroamericans who live or have lived in Africa are authors and illustrators. Most books appear in a series of school supplementary readers. Picture books for younger children are often larger in size and may have color illustrations limited to the four primary colors. Almost all children's books published in Africa are about Africa and are specific as to countries and local areas within countries. The illustrations are usually more generalized than the text. Often there is a glossary at the end of the book, related to the primary educational purpose of books to help children learn to read.

CONTENT OF BOOKS IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING AFRICA

Folklore

The oral tradition is still alive in Africa. Folklore is told and retold to relatives and friends, read on the radio, and performed on television and by children's theater groups. African children's books include a wealth of folklore which has been collected by the authors with the aim of preserving cultural traditions or providing children with familiar material to read. Most folklore appears in collections of short tales. An introduction usually identifies the ethnic group or country of origin and tells when and from whom the tales were collected.

Although the plots of folktales are often simplified for children, African personal and place names are used and words from local languages are often included. For example, spider is called "Ananse" in Ghana and rabbit is called "Sungura" in Kenya. Local words such as "asantehene" and "shamba" are often used instead of the generic terms chief and farm. Many tales include common features of oral narratives such as songs, poems, repetition, ideophones, and patterned beginnings and endings. A great variety of human, animal and supernatural characters appear in the tales.

Songs are one aspect of oral narrative style that are frequently included in folklore for children. Usually songs are represented as poems, but in Yuda Komora's *Songs of Songo*, musical scores are included so the songs may be sung at the appropriate places in the tales to memorialize dead warriors or accompany work, hunting or dancing. Oral narrative style also is retained in part by presenting folktales as plays. *The Sun Men and Other Plays* by Anne Matindi and Cynthia Hunter includes extensive dialogue and directions for action so the tales can be acted out in a manner similar to storytelling sessions.

Folktales also are retold with ideophones and poetic language so they retain the rhythm of storytelling as in Chinua Achebe's *The Drum*. Achebe uses ideophones like "Aja mbene, Mbe mbene, aja mbene" for the sound of tortoise's footsteps and "Kpam putu" for the beat of a drum in this tale which explains how greed resulted in the dispersion of animals in the world. A whole tale may be built around a single ideophone as in *Ee Ar Ee Ar Ee Ar* by Godfrey Brown, where the ideophone of the title is the sound of snoring. In the tale, villagers in Sierra Leone mistake the snoring of a guest for beautiful singing and give him a reward instead of punishing him for disturbing them.

The All Africa Readers series of which *Ee Ar Ee Ar Ee Ar* is a part has a unique format. The tales appear in the form of strip cartoons. The drawings by Prue Theobalds are integrally related to the narrative, since some of the dialogue appears in the illustrations in comic book fashion in

small circles above the speakers' heads. Other dialogue and a brief narrative are printed above and below the illustrations. Although the cartoon strip format is seldom used in books, it is common in African newspaper and magazine columns for children.

Some folklore appears in illustrated books for younger children with only one tale in the volume. A uniquely presented folktale for younger children is Tendai Makura's *Why the Cock Crows*, which is hand-printed in large letters rather than typeset, and illustrated with simple line drawings by the author's teenage daughter, Varaidzo Manzuei Makura. This tale about people who have trouble sleeping and their test of animals to see which one can wake them is full of animal sounds. More typical of picture books for younger children is Eutychus Ndirangu's *The Island of Yo*, with full-page color drawings by Adrienne Kennaway of people, mermaids, fish, the sea and palm trees which complement the narrative about how the Ocean Goddess destroyed the island of Yo because its inhabitants sacrificed her daughter.

Historical tales for older children, which seldom include illustrations, occasionally appear as single volumes because of their length. L. D. Apraku's *A Prince of the Akans*, for example, is about Kumahene (Killer of Kings), an Akan prince in Ghana. However, historical tales more frequently are incorporated into non-fiction books about African history and culture.

Folktales are sometimes included in works of fiction, as in J. O. de Graft-Hanson's *Papa and the Animals*. Papa Ewusi, a Ghanaian schoolboy, meets animals whom he tells about losing his magic marble. The animals in turn tell him folktales which are a major component of the story about the loss of Papa's magic marble.

Fiction

Most fiction written for African children is didactic. However, with the indigenization of publishing in Africa, most writers attempt to create fiction which is both entertaining and educational. The adventure story is replacing the fictional child biography as the predominant type of story. Most stories are about schoolchildren, but in contrast to those written in the preindependence period, they focus on schoolchildren's activities outside school, or their mischief-making in school, as well as on their struggles to remain in school. Most fiction touches on both the positive and negative realities of contemporary African life, such as the importance of strong family ties, the increase in interethnic ties among children, civil war, and urban crime.

Fiction for younger children is usually illustrated with full-page, black-and-white or two-color drawings which directly complement the narration. Stories about schoolchildren are common. *Eme Goes to School* by Ifeoma Okoye is about a four-year-old girl who is supposed to go to nursery school but wants to stay home. In contrast, Tunde, the six-year-old hero of *Tunde's First Day at School* by Remi Adedeji, can hardly wait to go to school and wear a "smart uniform" like the other children.

Picture storybooks for younger children focus on children at home as often as they focus on children at school. *Affa*, written by Doreen Abanga and illustrated with realistic drawings by Fiona Arkorful, is about a ten-year-old boy who lives in northeastern Ghana. The story follows Affa's activities for one day as he does chores in the family compound, goes to school, visits a market, observes farming activities, the collection of honey and weaving, eats dinner with his family, plays a flute, dances, and listens to his father tell a rabbit trickster tale before he goes to bed. This story, like many others, emphasizes the importance of African tradition in the lives of contemporary schoolchildren.

In Africa, as elsewhere, there is more variety in the themes of fiction written for older children. School stories written for older children often focus on more than school routines. The hero of *Kofizee Goes to School* by Mercy Owusu-Nimoh is a precocious six-year-old schoolboy who relates his home life to school. He teaches his classmates a "name song" he learned from his father and persuades his classmates to use the money earned from selling produce raised on the school farm to start a library where they can read "beautiful books with lots of beautiful pictures about African children."

Moses, the hero of Barbara Kimenye's series of stories about a Ugandan schoolboy and his two friends, Rukia and King Kong, who attend the Mukibi Educational Institute for the Sons of African Gentlemen, is a mischief-maker as well as a serious student. In *Moses*, Moses and his friends catch thieves in the house of the school's headmaster, while in *Moses the Camper*, they discover hidden jewelry and capture the thieves who stole it but accidentally start a fire at their school. Girls cause Moses and his friends trouble in *Moses and the Penpal*, when a teacher intercepts a letter to a female penpal, and in *Moses in a Muddle*, when a girl enrolls in their boys' school. Although boarding school life is part of the social context of all of the Moses stories, action and adventure are more important than the realistic background.

Schoolchildren may be involved in adventures which have no connection with classroom activities, as in Gabriel Okara's *An Adventure to Juju Island*, where the heroes catch drug dealers and kidnappers while on school holiday in Port Harcourt. In *Kukoro-Koo!* by Mary Okoye, schoolchildren discover corruption in the planning and building of a new girls' school. Although the children seek advice from their schoolmaster as they solve the mysteries surrounding the new school building, it is their keen observation and resourcefulness which lead to the apprehension of the guilty persons.

The problems which children try to solve in fiction may be practical ones related to the economic development of their countries, as in the Puzzlecrackers series of entertaining stories written by Elijah M. Kariuki which include descriptions of elementary aspects of science and technology and diagrams of the technical apparatus featured in each story. In *The Underground Water Puzzle*, the three teenage heroes decide to solve the problem of Sukuma village, which has no local water supply. First they learn about water underground, then they learn about boreholes and wells, and finally they observe an African engineer make a

borehole and erect a windmill so the village can obtain water. In *The Fire Puzzle,* the heroes learn about biogas digesters as a solution to the problem of how people can make fire without wood, which can no longer be cut because of scarcity and forestry regulations. All of the stories in the series emphasize hard work and the importance of adopting modern technology in rural areas.

Although most of the fiction for children in Africa focuses on heroes, there are some stories with heroines. In Miriam K. Were's *Your Heart Is My Altar*, the heroine faces a not uncommon fictional and real-life situation of a girl being forced to leave school before completing her primary education and being unable to marry the man of her choice because he belongs to a social group with whom her family has traditionally been enemies. Although this story is about serious cultural conflicts pertaining to religion, social customs and education, it is humorous because of the heroine's naivety and comments on girl-boy relationships. Cyprian Ekwensi's *Motherless Baby* is a more serious story about a teenage mother who abandons her son who is born out of wedlock, and the subsequent tragedies in her life as she tries to keep informed about the welfare of her son and begin life again as the wife of a successful businessman. The story includes incidents that reflect real life in Nigeria, such as the conflict faced by young people who want to be free from family control, the teasing of orphans because their parentage is unknown, and the stigma and social pressures that result from childlessness.

Adventure stories with teenage heroes based on incidents reported in the mass media also are common. A series of stories written by Dan Fulani about Sauna, a northern Nigerian primary school drop-out to whom "things" happen and who is always getting into trouble, focus on the hero's apprehension of bank robbers, a secret agent who is trying to appropriate a uranium mine, and traitors who are planning to overthrow the government. In *Sauna to the Rescue*, Sauna and his friends search for a missing boy from a neighboring village which leads them deep into a forest reserve and the discovery of gun runners. Before the adventure is over Sauna is transported in a truck full of weapons, stows away in a bag in a truck belonging to the traitors, decodes a radio message sent to the traitors, and sends a false radio message that results in the traitors being captured by the police.

Relatively little fantasy other than that included in folklore is written for African children. *Travels of a Raindrop* by David Ngosos is about a talking hailstone that claims it is older than Mt. Kenya and Lake Victoria and was among the raindrops that fell at the source of the Nile River and caused great floods. Like most African fiction for children, this fantasy is didactic and has a clear lesson to teach about contemporary life.

THE FUTURE

Despite technical and financial limitations on the publication of African children's literature, the publishing industry has grown dramatically in quantity and improved substantially in quality in the last 25 years. With the continued increase in the school-age population and the goal of universal primary education throughout Subsaharan Africa, the need for children's books will increase. National and international programs have been created to alleviate the technical and financial problems of publishing, and more individuals are becoming dedicated to publishing materials with content relevant to African children.

The training of African authors and illustrators has increased substantially in the last decade. There is now a core of experienced, prolific children's writers including Meshack Asare of Ghana, Remi Adedeji of Nigeria, and Anne Matindi and Charity Waciuma in Kenya. Many internationally respected African creative writers for adults also write for children, including novelists Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Gabriel Okara, Bonnie Lubega, Meja Mwangi, Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa and Miriam Were. Cyprian Ekwensi is unique among African creative writers because he has written for children throughout his prolific literary career. African scholars also write books for children including classicist J. O. de Graft-Hanson of Ghana, folklorist Asenath Odaga of Kenya, and Nigerian historians E. J. Alagoa and Obaro Ikime.

With so much attention being devoted to African children's literature and so many experienced and talented authors writing for African children, there is every reason to expect that the publication of African children's literature will triple again before the end of this century.

A list of African children's books in the Indiana University Library is available **FREE** from the African Studies Program, Woodburn Hall 221, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405.